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MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAIROBI FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Women and children under apartheid

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

In its resolution 1993/13, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-eighth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. Bearing in mind the rapid changes taking place in South Africa, including an increasing concern with the advancement of women and progress towards a democratic multi-racial society, the present report concentrates on supplying information considered to be more recent than that presented in the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (E/CN.6/1993/11).

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INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 1993/13, the Economic and Social Council, recognizing that the equality of women and men cannot be achieved without the success of the struggle towards a united, non-racist, non-sexist and democratic South Africa, requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-eighth session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The situation of women in a post-apartheid society is part of the wider discussion of the issue of apartheid. In response to General Assembly resolution 47/116 A, the Secretary-General reported to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session on measures taken to facilitate the peaceful elimination of apartheid and the transition of South Africa to a non-racial and democratic society as envisaged in the Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa (A/48/691).

3. As part of the international action with regard to South Africa, the United Nations, together with the Commonwealth, is planning to convene, in June 1994, an International Donors Conference on Human Resource Development for a Post-Apartheid South Africa to stimulate interest among donor countries and agencies in addressing the human resource development needs of a post-apartheid South Africa, particularly those of the disadvantaged sectors of society.

4. The present report describes briefly the current situation of women in terms of violence, law and participation in the political life of South Africa. It is based largely on information gathered from bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations dealing with the issue of apartheid, as well as information obtained from published reports. A more complete report will be possible only after the forthcoming elections have been held in South Africa and the subsequent Donors Conference.

I. THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE

5. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session, violence continues to pose a major threat to the peace process (A/48/691, para. 7). The General Assembly, in its resolution 48/159 on the elimination of apartheid and the establishment of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa, strongly urged the South African authorities to exercise fully and impartially the primary responsibility of government to bring to an end the ongoing violence, to protect the lives, security and property of all South Africans in all of South Africa and to promote and protect their right to participate in the democratic process.

6. The Ministry of Justice of South Africa has published three draft bills covering the promotion of equal opportunities, the prevention of domestic violence and the abolition of discrimination against women. In January 1993, the Government of South Africa signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. 1/ In its general recommendation No. 19, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women affirmed that

the provisions of that Convention cover all aspects of violence against women. 2/

7. There have been a number of recent positive developments in areas related to women and violence. In February 1993, South Africa's first specialized rape court was opened in Wynberg, with the promise of others to follow across the country. A rape and child molestation court has recently been established in Cape Town to address specifically the increasing problems of domestic violence, child abuse and rape in the area.

8. The issue of violence is one of the most important issues to mobilize township women. Violence threatens the social fabric and the stability of the family. Some signs of organization in response to violence are already emerging, involving efforts on the part of "Women For Peace", church organizations, Manyano, the Women's National Coalition (which has embarked on various activities) and Black Sash. 3/

II. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

9. One study suggests that women constitute 2 per cent of those in power in South Africa. 4/ This contrasts with the fact that women make up 54 per cent of the voting population.

10. A major challenge for women is whether they will be elected to serve in the Constituent Assembly that will write the new constitution. The election has been designed so that parties will be represented on the basis of proportional representation. Each party has been allowed to submit a list of 200 names for a national election and 200 names regionally, for a total of 400 seats.

11. The National Executive Committee of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) has announced its decision that at least one third of the candidates it submits for election to the Constituent Assembly in April will be women. Of the 200 candidates who figure on the ANC final list of candidates, 67 are women. Information is not yet available on the lists of the other parties participating in the election.

12. In South Africa, demographic indicators show that there are approximately 22 million potential voters. Africans constitute 72.3 per cent of the general population. Millions of black men and women will vote for the first time in the country's first one-person, one-vote election, which is scheduled for 27 April 1994. It is important to note that there are slightly more women potential voters than men. Women make up at least 54 per cent of the population of new voters. The majority of these women are Africans, among whom 42 per cent are 25 to 44 years old. 5/ It is important to recognize that the electorate is best understood not as individuals but as groups of people influenced by the sector, region and age, ethnic or language group to which they belong.

13. Voter education is considered essential to ensure that the electorate is informed about political parties and their policies as a means of guaranteeing the legitimacy of the elections. The task of voter education is enormous, given the size of the electorate and the fact that few of the political parties,

including the ANC, have stood for a national election before. Moreover, there is a fear of violence in connection with the election process, which may make voting difficult in some areas. In rural areas, where there is a high concentration of African women, travel costs and time, and difficulties in accessing participants, will also present problems.

14. Studies conducted by Grahamstown University highlight the high illiteracy rate among the African population. A survey conducted found absolute illiteracy to be 63 per cent. Eight out of 10 people surveyed in rural areas were found to be functionally illiterate. Another survey conducted by Research Initiatives showed that a high percentage of women (both rural and urban) did not understand the electoral process and that there was a greater need for voter education among women as compared to men.

15. Studies show a strong correlation between educational levels and occupation. 6/ Women are more likely to be found in some occupational categories than others. Among economically active African women, 64.2 per cent were found in service occupations and in farming and farming-related activities. In contrast, only 12.1 per cent were found in managerial, executive and administrative occupations.

III. WOMEN'S CHARTER

16. The Women's National Coalition, created in April 1992, launched a campaign for the Women's Charter in March 1993, to ensure that South African women are recognized, protected and granted legal equality by the new democratic Government to be elected in April 1994. The Charter is expected to form part of the national constitution. The question of the Charter's specific status in relation to the national constitution is still a matter of debate within the Coalition. One view is that the Charter should be a justiciable document; another view is that it should simply be an inspirational document, which can be used as a point of reference in the constitutional court, for instance. This question is expected to be a central item for consideration by the National Convention in February 1994, when the Charter will be presented.

17. After a year of intensive research, including a nationwide survey and the participation of a broad base of South African women, the Women's National Coalition released a summary research report on women's issues for a Women's Charter. The report, based on 203 focus groups, highlights some key concerns of all the women interviewed.

18. A methodology workshop held in early 1993 debated different research approaches at length to determine which would best capture a representative sample of views of South African women. There was general agreement that the process of involving women in identifying and prioritizing their needs and demands and suggesting ways of solving their problems was an important issue.

19. The research project 7/ included a number of different research strategies: focus groups, strategic in-depth interviews and questionnaires for experts and those with particular experiences to recount, media surveys, a chain letter asking women to identify three issues of concern to them, a community report

card, and public hearings and tribunals. A detailed demographic profile was drawn up to determine which groups should be accessed through these processes.

20. The work that has been done in relation to the Charter campaign might provide important groundwork for building a more coherent and mobilized women's constituency. A significant discussion took place at the Gender Equality Conference, hosted by the Women's National Coalition in May 1993, concerning the development of a human rights culture in South Africa that would include women's rights. The idea of the Charter campaign is that women will feel part of the new constitutional dispensation and, through their involvement in the campaign, feel able to claim their human rights in the future. Another objective of the campaign is to raise the level of gender sensitivity among both men and women in South Africa.

Notes

1/ General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

2/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/47/38), chap. I.

3/ Mosidi Mpahlele, "Women and voter education in South Africa", (draft report prepared for Matla Trust, Development Bank of Southern Africa), p. 10.

4/ See Programme for Development Research, Prodder Newsletter, vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1993).

5/ Study conducted by Mclachlan, Budlender and Maconachie (1993).

6/ Mosidi Mpahlele, op. cit., p. 8.

7/ See "Chartering women's future", Southern Africa Report, November 1993.